6: Sauer--110-111 G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut-1-2
116, 173, 619

"Omogai, [RCH: the old chief who had led his Yakut-speaking tribe from Lake Baikal to Olekma] who had a daughter by his wife then living, and a young woman whom he had adopted, was old, jealous, and dreaded the effects of Aley's [RCH: the young successor to the chief] power. He observed, that all his tribe esteemed Aley to adoration; for they supposed him to possess supernatural powers, and attributed his continual good fortune and success to the immediate influence of spirits. This made him uneasy; and, with a view of securing his possessions and his name, he offered Aley his daughter in marriage. Aley now avowed himself a Shaman, and assumed the powers of divination. He told Omogai, that his daughter would never have children, and therefore he would not take her; but demanded the young woman that the chief had adopted, with whom he should have a numerous family. The mother violently opposed this union, but Omogai at length consented. Aley's life was soon rendered very unpleasant by the persecution of the mother and [111] daughter; but, having received very liberal presents from Omogai at the time of obtaining the eldership of the tribe, and as rewards for his careful management not only of cattle and horses, but also of men and women labourers, he was in possession of independent wealth; and therefore retired, with Omogai's consent, two days' journey from his habitation, and established himself on the plains 18 versts north-west of the present town of Yakutsk, by the side of a branch of the river Lena, now dry. Here he remained till the death of his benefactor, when the greatest part of the tribe

came over to him. Aley, who was now become extremely powerful, is reported to have had 12 sons and several daughters (Ghanghalas, or Chanhallas), the eldest of whom was the founder of the Ghanghalaski tribe. The remaining history of Omogai's wife and daughter I have not been able to learn; but the tribe is now known by the name of Batulinsk. It is said to be about 300 years since Omogai migrated hither.

The Batulinski tribe was afterwards increased by a number of the Chorintski Burats; but the time of their union is unknown. I am inclined to think that their language was different; for if a Yakut be not immediately understood by his brethren, he expresses his dislike to repeat the sentence, by saying, 'I spoke not with the tongue of a Chorintski.'"

6: Sauer--112 G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut
116, 175, 619

"Millach is the first chief reported to have gone over to the Russians. He had a small tribe, which separated from the Ghanghalaski, under the charge of the chief Tygin. Millach inhabited a hill on the eastern shores of the Lena 60 versts below Yakutsk, called Tshebedal. He supplied the Russians with food, and gave them 40 archers to subdue Tygin and his tribe, which was accomplished on Tygin's falling in the field. Tribute was collected in 1630, and in 1632 the first ostrog [RCH: fortress] was built among them on the mountain Tshebedal, but afterwards removed to the place where the town now stands. Millach's tribe is now known by the name of Namski Ulus, or Our Tribe, a name given to it by the Russians."

17: Erman--273 N-3 (1828-29) 1850 Yakut
619

"The whole race has been divided, from time immemorial, into certain tribes; each of which is again distributed into Ulúsi, [RCH: the Ulus is a subtribe] or communes."

24: Wrangell--167 G-3 (1820-23) 1842 Yakut
116, 619

"What has been said of the Jakuti of the Jakuzk district will apply to those of the Kolyma. Their language, their habitations, their clothing, and their modes of life, are the same; but the hunting weapons of those of the Kolyma consist only of bows and arrows, and a large knife called pal'ma."

24: Wrangell--292-293 G-3 (1820-23) 1842 Yakut
116, 511, 577, 619

"The character of the Jakuti of Werchojansk has been injured by constant intercourse with their countrymen of Jakuzk, and litigiousness, quarrels, dishonesty, and a passionate love of card-playing are equally general among them both. Distrust of their neighbours induces them to keep their cattle at night in the jurte which they inhabit, the pestiferous atmosphere of which defies description. The Jakuti who live near the Kolyma are far more cleanly in their habits; they are better dressed, and their dwellings are more comfortable and neat; this is particularly the case in the settlements at some distance from the route along which the traders who [293] carry brandy pass on their way from Jakuzk to Kolymsk."

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

most of the vocabulary and the grammatical structure are undoubtedly Turkic in origin. At the same time, the language contains a considerable number of loan words from the Mongol and Tungus languages. Academician V. V. Radlov (1908) put forward the hypothesis that the vocabulary, phonetic structure, and even the grammatical structure of the Yakut language has a pre-Turkic, more ancient stratum of partly Mongol and partly indeterminate origin.

The latest research, admittedly, has not confirmed this hypothesis; hence the problem of non-Turkic elements in the Yakut language requires further study. Analysis of the names of the Yakut tribal-clan groups (known from 17th-century documents and also from later data) confirms that the Yakut population is further made up of immigrant groups from the south. To judge by the names, these include the present-day Batulins, Khorins, Tumats, Ergits, and some other clans and nasleg[1]. It may be considered that pastoral groups, taking their nomadic culture with them, gradually infiltrated the Middle Lena Basin from the south, from the Baykal regions. One of the principal groups of these migrants from the south was evidently the Kurykans—a Turkic people inhabiting the western Baykal region in the 9th and 10th centuries. Since some of the Kurykans clearly contributed to the composition of the western Buryats later on, this explains many features of similarity in the culture of the western Buryats and Yakuts and the wide distribution of the same anthropological type among both of them.

The trek northwards was gradual and took a long time. In the Amga-Lena watershed, under conditions favorable for pastoralism, these newly arrived groups settled down, establishing contact with the local hunting-fishing population. In the process of economic and cultural contact, there was gradual absorption of the local population by the newcomers. A higher, pastoral type of economy and southern elements of culture, as well as the Turkic language, became predominant.

Such is the ethnogenesis of the Yakuts in the light of present-day knowledge.

Precise historical accounts of the Yakuts only date from the time of their first contact with the Russians, that is to say, 1620, and annexation to the Russian State. At that time the Yakuts were not a single political unit, but were divided into a number of independent tribes. Tribal relations were already decomposing, however, and there was a fairly clearly marked class stratification. The tsarist voyevods and soldiery took advantage of the intertribal strife to break the resistance of some of the Yakut population; they also took advantage of the class differences within it by pursuing a policy of systematic support of the ruling aristocratic clique, the princelings (toyons), whom they turned into their own agents for purposes of governing the Yakut district. From that moment on, the class differences among the Yakuts began to become more clearly marked.

The Yakut masses led a hard life. They paid tribute in sable and fox furs, had to perform a number of other compulsory services and were exploited by the tsarist soldiery, Russian merchants and their own toyons. After several unsuccesful uprisings (1634, 1636–1637, 1639–1640, and 1642), and after the toyons had gone over to the side of the voyevods, the Yakut masses could only retaliate against the oppression by sporadic attempts at resistance and flight from their native ulusy to outlying parts.

[1] A territorial and population unit; originally, the members of a single camp, now equivalent to the rayon.—Ed.

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

particular by the poorer people who had no cattle, although it was also a secondary diet for the wealthier groups in the population. In the summer, people used to eat fresh fish boiled in water or slightly fried (carp and other small fish), on spikes or in a frying pan (the scales were removed but the innards were left untouched). A great deal of fish was stocked up for the winter, pickled in bark-lined pits; the acidified and half-rotten fish—syma—was then frozen and used to make butugas as a substitute for milk tar. The more valuable types of fish, particularly steriet, white salmon, and whitefish of various types, were consumed in the raw, frozen form.

With rare exceptions, meat was eaten only in the wealthier households. Most highly valued was horsemeat, but even among the rich it was not served too often. Beef was eaten more frequently. The meat of various other animals, especially in the northern hunting regions, was also eaten. It was usually boiled (though attempts were made not to overcook it), and sometimes roasted in the old manner on wooden spikes. Fat was specially highly valued. The carcasses of slaughtered cattle were kept for the winter in frozen form. The Yakuts did not eat certain types of wild animals and birds—beasts of prey, sea gulls, ravens, cuckoos and owls—and they refused to eat the brains of domestic animals. During the 19th century, under Russian influence, bread began to be eaten and later salt, sugar and tea became part of the diet of the Yakuts. Dealers brought in vodka to the ulusy.

Hygiene

The living conditions of the Yakuts before the Revolution were extremely unhygienic. As a result of the filth, overcrowding and stagnant air in the yurt with its earthen floor and cattle-shed right next door conditions were completely abnormal. Furthermore, the Yakuts, particularly in winter, rarely washed themselves, and the washing of clothes was practically unknown.

Under the circumstances it is not surprising that there were frequent epidemics. Skin diseases were particularly rampant, and mange, ringworm, ulcers, and so on were due to the permanent contamination of the skin. Eye diseases (trachoma, etc.) were very common, particularly among the older people, a large number of whom lost their sight. According to the 1915 census, there were 110 blind people per 10,000 Yakuts. True leprosy existed in some of the damp, marshy regions; isolation shelters for lepers were arranged in out of the way spots. Tuberculosis was quite common.

Nervous disorders were widespread in the northern regions of Yakutiya, particularly among women, which was due to the difficult living conditions, exhausting work, and to a number of women's diseases, etc. The nervous disorders took such forms as Arctic hysteria, the so-called menerik, which is something like epilepsy; the sick woman throws a fit during which she shouts and raves until she falls asleep exhausted. Another, similar nervous disorder was *amyrpax*; the symptoms are an unconscious, involuntary imitation of anything which frightens or astonishes the sufferer.

The Yakuts had no rational method of treating these ailments. They often used primitive domestic cures such as cauterizing, licking the pus from sores and so on. It was usual during sickness to resort to quack doctors and shamans.

Social Structure

The social structure of the Yakuts, as it had developed by the time of the October Revolution, was a peculiar mishmash of complex forms of

53: Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

developed class relationships and certain very archaic survivals of ancient times. By the time the Russians arrived in the first half of the 17th century, the Yakuts had divided up into independent tribes. The largest and strongest of these were the Kangalastay and Namа on the left bank of the Lena, and the Megins, Borogons, Betuns and Baturustay between the Lena and the Amga; these very large tribes (to judge by the Russian tribute registers) numbered from 2000 to 5000 persons each. The smaller tribal groupings, some of which were independent and some of which belonged to those mentioned above, were reckoned in dozens. In the Russian sources these tribes are called "volosts," but the Yakut name for them was evidently d'on or aymakh. These tribes often warred with one another, and sometimes banded together temporarily for joint operations. All members of one tribe were considered fellow clansmen, which, among other things, was indicated by the fact that the "volosts" were exogamic groups. In turn, the tribes divided into smaller clan groups. The bond between fellow clansmen showed up in the custom of mutual assistance and vendetta, which, incidentally, was often replaced by blood money.

At this period, however, the clan-tribal structure was already in a state of decomposition. The tribes and clans were headed by the military aristocracy—the toyons. These possessed large herds of cattle and employed the labor of slaves and dependent fellow clansmen on their farms; they were also the military leaders. Heading detachments of armed servants and junior fellow clansmen, the toyons raided each other's territory, and frequently looted the farms of the free members of the community, seizing their cattle and destroying their economic independence. These toyon wars and raids were one of the factors which speeded up the decomposition of the clan commune. The ruined members of the commune were reduced to the status of "balyksyts" (poor people without cattle, or fishermen), or else became the indentured slaves of the toyons. Most of the slaves (kuluts or bokans) originated in this way.

The system of slavery among the Yakuts was fairly peculiar in form, containing certain patriarchal elements. The number of slaves was small; even the richer toyons had no more than 15 or 20, and much more frequently there were one to three slaves for each master. The slave usually had his own family and often lived in a separate yurt. Slavery was hereditary. Some of the slaves—the adult males—were part of the armed band of the toyon. On the other hand, cases were known in which the slaves led a hard life and their masters treated them cruelly, and we also know of the manifestation, although embryonic, of class feeling against exploitation (flight by groups of slaves and so on).

The problem of whether or not there was feudalism among the Yakuts before the Russians arrived still remains unsolved in Soviet historical-ethnographic literature.

Some writers (S. V. Bakhrushin and O. V. Ionova) think that early feudal relations among the Yakuts began to form in the pre-Russian period; they consider the presence of groups of semidependent people "living close to" the toyons, as well as the custom of lending cattle for grazing (the later khahaas), to be signs of this. Tokarev considers that a feudal-type relationship only began to form among the Yakuts after they had been annexed to Russia.

As regards land ownership, the older communal-clan system was still in force just before the Russians arrived. The communal form of land use not only predominated in forest hunting grounds and pastures, but the fisheries and even the meadows were still by and large in common use. Nevertheless, the meadows and fisheries had already been taken over to

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

the whole of their lives, and only occasionally eat their fill . . . it is a country of systematic starvation."[4] But the Yakut toiling masses were particularly badly off during the long and severe Yakutiyan winter. "The periods of hunger," wrote another observer, "when there is absolutely nothing to eat, when all the crumbs have been picked up and consumed, when the cows carrying calves are not milked, and nature, paralyzed by the cold, firmly resists all attempts to find food, are repeated every year and two-thirds of the Yakut population have to suffer for a fairly prolonged period on this account." [5]

On the other hand, individuals with fortunes of tens of thousands of rubles stood out among the wealthy Yakut hierarchy. The wealthy estates developed mainly through trade and various kinds of speculation, although the owners did not hesitate to apply the old patriarchal-feudal methods of exploitation in amassing their wealth.

Crushed by the omnipotence of the toyons, the masses of poor people in the ulus hardly dared to protest or fight for their rights. It was only now and then that the toyon oppression gave rise to outbursts of protest, but these were sporadic and promptly suppressed. This was the fate of the revolt of Vasiliy Manchara (1830-1850), hero of the Yakut legends.

Given the sharp class contradictions, it was extremely characteristic that certain very archaic survivals were retained in the Yakut social structure and left on it their own strange imprint. Some of these survivals were nothing more than form devoid of its original content.

Right up to the Revolution the Yakuts retained their division into clans (*нуучча*). But the clans were purely administrative units legalized by the "Native Code" of 1822, although they were historically descended from the ancient clans of the clan-tribal stage.

At the head of these administrative clans stood elected elders (who were called in the old-fashioned Yakut language "princelings" (kinees, or achchygyy kinees—"small princeling"). Several clans banded into a nasleg, which was also governed by an elected elder (in actual fact often hereditary), known in the Yakut language as ulakhan kinees or "great prince," who together with the clan elders made up the "clan administration." A group of naslegs formed an ulus, at the head of which there was an elected ulus head and a "native council." The ulusy, and also some of the naslegs, and even the clans, were historically associated with the ancient Yakut tribes, whose names they continued to bear—for example, the Meginskiy, Borogonskiy, Baturusskiy, Namskiy, Western and Eastern Kangalasskiy and other ulusy, the Betyunskiy, Batulinskiy, Ospetskiy and other naslegs.

At the end of the 19th century there were in all 17 ulusy, divided into 230 naslegs and 934 clans in the Yakut district (in the four okrugs—Yakutskiy, Vilyuyskiy, Verkhoyanskiy and Kolymskiy, since in the fifth—Olekminskiy Okrug—the ulusy were replaced by volosts of the Russian type).

Only the terminology of the tribal structure was retained in this administrative system. In actual fact, the tribal administrations and native councils were only organs of power of the ruling toyon stratum

---

[4] V. F. Troshchanskiy. Nabroski o yakutakh Yakutskogo okruga (Notes on the Yakuts in the Yakutskiy Okrug). Kazan', 1911, p. 17.

[5] V. L. Seroshevskiy. Yakuty (opyt etnograficheskogo issledovaniya). 1 (The Yakuts [Attempt at an Ethnographic Study]). St. Petersburg, 1896, p.423.